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Fifty-second Session

Official Records

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New York

President: Mr. Udovenko ..... (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Address by Mr. Milan Kučan, President of the Republic of Slovenia

The President: This afternoon the Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia.

Mr. Milan Kucan, President of the Republic of Slovenia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Slovenia, His Excellency Mr. Milan Kučan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Kučan *(spoke in Slovene; interpretation provided by the delegation)*: Please allow me at the outset, Sir, to express my sincere congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. The expectations of this session are great and the tasks demanding; however, your experience and political wisdom are a guarantee that they will be fulfilled.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank His Excellency for Razali Ismail, Ambassador of Malaysia, for his energetic and successful presidency of the fifty-first session.

Almost two years have passed since we, Heads of State and Government of the United Nations Member States, confirmed our commitment to the idea of reform in this very Hall. This reform should contribute to the accomplishment of the mission of the United Nations in the current international situation as well as to greater efficiency of the Organization. Today, we have before us a comprehensive set of proposals by the Secretary-General in "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform" (A/51/950). This document proves that the discussions held within the last two years, and the experience gained in recent decades, have helped the new Secretary-General to prepare, within a few months, concrete proposals providing a basis for further decisions.

Slovenia joins those who have expressed their appreciation to the Secretary-General for the impressive work he has performed in the first months of his mandate. This work has included concrete measures for the functioning of the Secretariat and proposals for reform. We are well aware, however, that the responsibility now lies with us. We, the representatives of the Member States and the peoples of the United Nations, are responsible for decisions that will give impetus to the necessary reforms and enable the Organization to deal with the tasks of the coming century.

Our approach should not be based primarily on calculations of what individual Member States might gain from the reform. It should above all be based on an assessment of how to reform the Organization so that it will better serve all of us. This will be possible only if

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the Organization becomes better able to fulfil its basic tasks — the maintenance of international peace and security and comprehensive economic and social development, particularly in developing countries — and to ensure broad respect for the promotion and protection of individual and collective human rights.

Another important requirement for the success of this reform programme is for the United Nations to take its decisions promptly and on time. The past years have made possible all-round discussion about reform. And now is the time for decisions: Slovenia believes that major decisions should be taken during the first part of the present session of the General Assembly. The President of the General Assembly will play a significant role with regard to those decisions that cannot be postponed. We fully support and encourage you, Sir, in your assumption of an active role and in your determined management of the decision-making process.

Slovenia supports the proposals contained in the Secretary-General's report on a programme for reform. This project deserves all our attention and assistance. Its main value is that it offers the possibility of concrete decisions while remaining open to new ideas and proposals.

The proposals for promoting sustainable development, defined as a priority task by the Secretary-General himself, deserve careful examination. The impression is that these proposals are headed in the right direction, although clearer answers to questions on development financing will be required. The "development dividend" created by the streamlining of the Secretariat will not be able to provide all the answers we need. Concrete proposals will be needed to define more accurately the tasks of the proposed office for development financing, which would encourage innovative means of mobilizing new financial resources for development.

Slovenia agrees with the suggestion of the Secretary-General that human rights should be integrated into all principal activities of the United Nations, such as peace and security, economic and social affairs, development cooperation and humanitarian affairs. This approach promises a significant improvement in the activities of the United Nations in these areas. It would also lead to increasingly comprehensive United Nations activities in the field of human rights.

Respect for human rights is achieved not only through the functioning of instruments to monitor compliance with international treaties but also through political, social and economic measures that allow human rights to become an integral part of social development and a part of the everyday life of each individual. Observance of human rights must be closely linked with the promotion of social progress and the eradication of poverty in order to secure human dignity, essential social security and development. Furthermore, this would substantially contribute to the elimination of political tensions and of the root causes of threats to international peace. Should the United Nations fail to ensure respect for human dignity and the protection of human rights, its basic mission will not be fulfilled.

The new High Commissioner for Human Rights will certainly assume an important role in the search for solutions to salient issues. We note with pleasure that it is Mrs. Mary Robinson, until recently the President of Ireland, who has been appointed to this post. Mrs. Robinson has already won worldwide recognition, and we wish her every success and look forward to her proposals for improvements in the field of human rights.

Reform of the Security Council constitutes an important part of the reform of the United Nations. The period following the end of the cold war only reconfirms the importance of the effective functioning of the mechanisms of collective security. However, it also calls for changes in the composition of the Security Council and for the improvement of its working methods. Slovenia is committed to a reasonable and balanced increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council, to a restriction on the use of the veto and to greater transparency in the functioning of the Council. It is our hope that the discussions on Security Council reform, which have been going on for several years now, will lead to appropriate decisions that have the genuine support of the membership of the United Nations.

Slovenia also endorses the approach taken by the Secretary-General in the field of disarmament. Disarmament has been one of the priority goals of the United Nations since its foundation. We have good reason to be satisfied, since disarmament efforts have registered considerable progress with respect to weapons of mass destruction. The Chemical Weapons Convention, signed four years ago, entered into force this year. We expect it to be implemented effectively, although this will be feasible only if the Convention is ratified by all the remaining countries, particularly those disposing of large stockpiles of chemical weapons or of resources for their production.

The indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty last year have considerably reduced the dangers created by nuclear weapons. But the time has come to take further steps. We need to ensure universal adherence to the ban on nuclear tests and to accelerate negotiations for the ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. Endeavours towards the reduction of nuclear-weapon arsenals should be intensified in order to ensure their gradual elimination.

I wish to place special emphasis on the importance of the early adoption of the international convention on a comprehensive ban on anti-personnel landmines and their destruction. Slovenia has joined those countries that have already renounced their use, transfer and production, and has been participating actively in the Ottawa process since its inception. Negotiations concerning these issues have just been brought to a successful conclusion at the diplomatic conference in Oslo. Early in December of this year, Slovenia will join those who intend, in the presence of the Secretary-General, to sign the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Landmines and on Their Destruction.

Disarmament efforts constitute an important element in the strengthening of international security. The formation and implementation of the regional arms control and disarmament regimes represent an effective mechanism in strengthening security. The experience gained during the Balkan crisis, which posed the most serious threat to peace in Europe since the foundation of the United Nations, strengthens our belief that lower armament thresholds should be imposed. More weapons can only present greater temptation and danger.

None of the endeavours aimed at modernizing the Organization by providing relevant answers to global issues will have any guarantee of success if the United Nations proves unable to contribute to the solution of those crisis situations that pose a threat to international peace and that generate humanitarian problems. These situations are now assuming larger dimensions than in any other period of United Nations activity to date. The credibility of the Organization and the functioning of its main bodies must be repeatedly proven. Special importance in this respect must be attached to the activities of the Security Council, which, in accordance with the Charter, bears primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Today, expectations regarding action by the Security Council are more realistic than they were several years ago. However, they are no less demanding. The Security Council is taking an active part in issues concerning international peace on the African continent. It has proved its ability to apply a variety of the methods that are at its disposal in accordance with the Charter. These include preventive diplomacy, cooperation with the Organization of African Unity, classic peacekeeping operations and the use of measured and focused economic sanctions. The appropriate choice of these methods has enabled the Security Council to formulate relevant approaches to the situations in Liberia, Angola and Burundi. As for some other crisis areas, including the Republic of the Congo, the most appropriate approach still remains to be found.

The Security Council is also participating in settling issues which arise after the military conflicts. In Europe, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina provides an example of such involvement. Following the conclusion of the Dayton agreement, which halted the war, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has stabilized to a certain extent. Yet peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still far from secure. The return of refugees is proceeding slowly, is limited, and is facing hindrances. The authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina have not been functioning as stipulated in the peace accord, and the principal war-crime suspects have not yet been transferred to stand trial at the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The United Nations has been performing a number of important tasks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly in the areas of humanitarian aid, unarmed civil police activity and criminal prosecution. The scope of the present engagement of the United Nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina is, however, is in proportion with the increased coordination of action taken in Bosnia and Herzegovina by other international organizations. At the same time, success in those fields falling within the competence of the United Nations is of critical importance for the establishment of lasting peace.

Let me take this opportunity to stress that the inevitable starting point for solving the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the precise identification of the nature of that devastating war, which has not been completely stopped. If there is a lack of willingness to identify the reasons for and the nature of the war, and its aims and protagonists, then the healing will inevitably be a lengthy and expensive process, with many risks to human life and property. One must even envisage the possibility that the search for peace might prove unsuccessful.

The activities underway in Bosnia and Herzegovina have assumed the character of a post-conflict action, but their aim is also a preventive one. Experience gained in recent years has shown that conflicts often re-emerge in the absence of appropriate preventive action of a diplomatic, economic or, if necessary, military character. The time to withdraw the international forces from Bosnia and Herzegovina will have to be considered very carefully. Withdrawing too early could lead to a recurrence of the initial situation of instability or of armed conflict.

An example of successful preventive action representing an important lesson for the future has been provided by the international operation in Albania this year. Operation Alba was conducted on the initiative and under the leadership of Italy, in agreement with the Albanian Government and with the authorization of the Security Council. That operation has shown how quick and determined action taken by a group of countries in the vicinity of the emerging crisis situation, and with the authorization of the Security Council, can prevent armed conflict and potential destabilization in the region. Slovenia took part in that successful operation and is ready to participate in other preventive actions, as well as in other peacekeeping operations. That readiness has been confirmed by the decision of the Security Council to include a Slovenian contingent in the peacekeeping operation in Cyprus.

The recent international action in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, as examples of regional crises, demonstrates the importance of the participation of regional organizations; such a role has been played by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Slovenia's readiness to contribute towards implementing the objectives of the United Nations has also been manifested by the candidature of Slovenia for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 1998-1999 in the elections to be held at the General Assembly in a few weeks' time. Slovenia has confirmed its role as a State that has been successfully coping with the issues of development and of good-neighbourly relations. Within the scope of its possibilities, it has also been striving for long-term stabilization of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the region at large. Through this action and its other international activity, Slovenia has proved to be a factor for peace and stability in Europe.

As a Member of the United Nations, Slovenia is actively participating in the discussion on reform, including the issue of reform of the Security Council. Our readiness to contribute, in practice, to the work of the Security Council has been manifested by our cooperation in the peacekeeping operations in Albania and in Cyprus. And last but certainly not least, Slovenia has been paying its membership contributions to the regular budget and to the peacekeeping budget in full and on time.

As a candidate for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council, we undertake in the event of our election to observe the principles of openness and transparency of action, and will strive to strengthen the ties between the Security Council and rest of the membership of the United Nations.

May I in conclusion reiterate again the importance of this session of the General Assembly and of the decisions to be taken. We have arrived at a stage where we may see the crystallization of solutions that will prepare the United Nations to cope with the tasks of the next century. It is our responsibility to formulate these solutions in a sufficiently clear and comprehensive manner, and in that way provide for the viable future of our common Organization. I firmly believe that we, the present generation, will be able to preserve the United Nations as it was created by our forefathers in the turbulent time at the end of the Second World War, as an Organization committed to the principles of peace, cooperation, development and respect for human dignity.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Slovenia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Milan Kučan, President of the Republic of Slovenia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Carlos Alberto Wahnon de Carvalho Veiga, Prime Minister of the Republic of Cape Verde

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Cape Verde.

Mr. Carlos Alberto Wahnon de Carvalho Veiga, Prime Minister of the Republic of Cape Verde, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Carlos Alberto Wahnon de Carvalho Veiga, Prime Minister of the Republic of Cape Verde, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Veiga (Cape Verde) (*spoke in Portuguese; interpretation from French text furnished by the delegation*): My delegation is pleased to greet you, Sir, as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. I congratulate you warmly on your election; we have full confidence in your notable qualities as a wise and experienced diplomat.

I wish also to pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail, for the outstanding manner in which he carried out his responsibilities. We all benefitted from his exceptional ability and his dedication.

We were delighted at the election of the illustrious African Mr. Kofi Annan to the post of Secretary-General at a critical time in the history of the Organization. His splendid performance in other high United Nations posts and the creativity and dynamism that have marked the beginning of his term justify the legitimate hopes we have all placed in him.

The numerous and complex challenges before us at the dawn of the third millennium can be faced only by the combined will and efforts of all Member States. My Government fully recognizes the prominent role of the United Nations in the constant quest for relevant solutions. In today's world, in which sovereignty is less and less respected, interdependence and globalization are becoming increasingly real and tangible. As a result, we need the creation of new tools capable of raising confidence to a higher level and increasing cooperation between all international actors in a collective effort that alone can provide answers to the global questions confronting us.

For several years, our Organization has been experiencing an intensified process of reform aimed at giving it revitalized energy, renewed representativeness and legitimacy, increased effectiveness and greater transparency. The first consensus is emerging, and its benefits will doubtless soon be felt. Recent examples of this include the resolution adopted by the General Assembly following discussions in the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, as well as the adoption of an Agenda for Development, and the gains achieved so far on the road towards an Agenda for Peace.

It is very desirable that equally worthwhile progress take place in parallel with regard to the financial situation of the Organization. In this regard, my country shares the very broad consensus on the need for Member States to respect their obligation under the Charter to pay their contributions on time, in full and without conditions.

Reform of the Security Council is one of the most difficult elements among all the reforms being studied. The broad agreement required for a formula has not yet been found. Cape Verde recalls the joint position of the non-aligned countries, which are demanding non-discriminatory treatment for the developing countries, in particular with regard to the prerogatives accorded to the permanent members of the Council. For its part, Africa is now working to refine practical means for rotation within the continent of the seats that it expects to be at its disposal to represent its Member States.

The Secretary-General has shown us how convinced he is of the imperative for reform. He took certain decisions and began to implement them. He then asked us for advice and proposals. A fundamental objective of the proposed reforms is to provide unity and consistency to the global activity of the system, and thereby to have an increased impact. Structural transformations and changes in working methods are the favoured instruments for the implementation of this objective.

We thank and warmly congratulate the Secretary-General for his initiative, whose focus and broad scope reveal a deep knowledge of the Organization's situation and an enlightened vision of the directions that should be taken. We will give constructive support to these proposals in the consultations that will soon be intensifying at different levels: in the African Group, the Group of 77 and the General Assembly.

The quality of the future to which humankind aspires depends on what we can do today to give human beings their dignity and guarantee that they can enjoy the fundamental rights recognized in the international legal instruments that reflect our collective conscience. We must all commit ourselves to the resolute protection and constant promotion of human rights. The United Nations is dedicated to doing so at several levels and through different instruments. The Commission on Human Rights is one of the important ones, and Cape Verde is gratified that it is able to contribute to its work. To accomplish this task, which is limitless, we must ensure that we construct human rights around the axes that complement and

interact with them, as is the case with democracy and development.

Fully functioning democracy provides a vital impetus for the establishment of a human and institutional environment conducive to development and the implementation of human rights. However, beyond the formal political dimension, conditions must be created that allow all of our citizens to live in dignity and achieve improved standards of living. The right to development is therefore reaffirmed as a cornerstone for concerted action to ensure that such a right can be enjoyed by everyone throughout the world.

It is time to establish a true international understanding for development. Everything possible should be done to ensure that the Agenda for Development, long the subject of negotiation and recently adopted by the General Assembly, is fully implemented in practice. In this context, we regard as promising those concerted efforts recently made by the global institutions, including the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization in areas critical for development, such as financial flows, investment and commerce. We encourage the intensification of this concerted action, which has also been requested by the Economic and Social Council and encouraged by the Secretary-General. It can make a considerable contribution to the establishment of international cooperation, leading to development at both the global and country level.

We are presently engaged in a race against the clock. Many developing countries urgently need, finally, to experience the stirrings of an economic lift-off within the international trend. Otherwise, we are afraid that the hard-won reforms of the past and present will not be sustained, and will still less be able to gain the social backing that alone can ensure the eventual transition to the second generation of reforms.

The progress that we envisage is not limited solely to the economic arena. Solidarity will also be required. We cannot accept the continued existence of certain barriers that we have erected and that are now impeding us from fully enjoying our fundamental rights. I am thinking of such perversions as racism and exclusion areas based on xenophobia, discrimination which is inflicted on so many individuals, particularly immigrants.

Migratory movements have taken place throughout history. We should treat them with understanding and dialogue, which will enable us to find solutions to the inevitable problems, rather than allow them to become exacerbated. In this regard, international instruments can be extremely useful. It is important that the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families finally enter into force. We also hope that the Assembly will follow up the resolution of the Economic and Social Council on convening a world conference against racism, racial and ethnic discrimination, xenophobia and other related contemporary forms of intolerance.

On this continuing and unequal march towards development, in which all are involved, some of our countries remain among the least advanced. At a time of increased globalization, to warn against the risk of consolidating and perpetuating the marginalization of these countries is not mere rhetorical overstatement. On the contrary, this danger is very real. The least-developed countries' share of world exports continues to languish at very low levels, and their rate of growth even dropped in 1996.

External trade is vital for reversing the present situation of the least developed countries. The decision adopted in Marrakesh regarding measures to help them, as well as the World Trade Organization Plan of Action adopted last December in Singapore, recognize that the least developed countries urgently need to achieve a lasting increase in their exports. These countries must therefore significantly improve their competitive capability, and their exports of goods and services must have free access to all global markets.

In this sense, we are expecting initiatives from the high-level meeting on the least developed countries, to be held next month in Geneva aided by increased institutional synergy between those international bodies with competence and responsibility in areas critical for the development of the least developed countries.

The foreign debt of these countries continues to grow. The problem continues to be inadequately handled, as regards both the categories of countries covered by initiatives and the actual level of the initiatives. All least developed countries — not only the most critically affected — need adequate and lasting relief.

Moreover, the financing of certain elements indispensable for international integration of these countries, such as infrastructure and education, to cite only a few, requires a significantly increased flow of

public development aid. For the least developed countries, this will become ever more necessary in the future.

In Cape Verde, a least developed country which has suffered a prolonged drought, there is today national consensus about the country's future and the major paths to be followed. The reforms which we are undertaking have the support of the nation, which can legitimately aspire to improving its living conditions today, and not in the distant future.

The fact that the African continent contains the majority of the world's least developed countries speaks eloquently of its limitations. For the international community, Africa is a test of its will and its ability to meet the challenge of global development. The world will not be developed so long as Africa is not developed.

Solutions, as we know, begin at home. The present and the recent past of our continent confirm that we understand this, and are acting upon it more and more. I take this opportunity to thank those in the international community who are firmly supporting Africa's development and encourage them to have greater confidence in the future of our continent and in the partnership between Africa and its friends.

If the Africans continue to step up the changes under way in the right direction, and if there is concrete progress and cooperation in the international environment, it is likely that the positive signs of the last few years will progressively be consolidated in Africa.

However, there are constraints of another nature impeding the general progress sought by our continent: situations of conflict and potential conflict, which continue to proliferate, some of them particularly bloody. Experience — particularly recent experience — has shown that these conflicts are often highly complex. They become deeply rooted and thus thwart any diplomatic or other attempts at solution. However, that is no reason for the United Nations and its Member States to give up their efforts to solve these problems.

Working together and in concert with the United Nations, the Africans are becoming more active in their efforts at the regional level to contribute to preventing and managing the conflicts on the continent. Africa needs international support in order to step up its capacities in this area. Such support should not become a means of discrimination, negative or positive, with regard to certain conflicts as compared with others, based on the subjective preferences of donors. The multilateral nature of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) implies avoidance of this risk and balanced treatment of conflict situations.

The case of Angola has called for the greatest efforts of the United Nations in Africa — lengthy and repeated efforts. Unfortunately, a new deterioration in the situation, with violent consequences, is not impossible at a time when UNITA is persisting in failing to respect the terms of the Lusaka Accords. Therefore, the most recent Security Council resolution on Angola is fully justified, and we hope that it will have the desired effect. Only a few days from the expiration of its time limit, we urge UNITA to take the decisive steps required for lasting peace in Angola.

We would like to reaffirm here the support of Cape Verde for the people of East Timor in its quest for genuine self-determination, the preservation of its identity, and recognition of and total respect for its rights. We welcomed the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996 to two eminent individuals from East Timor, Don Ximenes Belo and Ramos-Horta. That award brought even more international attention to the situation of their people. It is time for reason and justice to prevail, and we welcome the appointment of a Special Representative for East Timor by the Secretary-General within the framework of his redoubled efforts to assist in finding an equitable solution to the conflict in the territory.

Last June, a special session of the General Assembly to assess the implementation of Agenda 21 achieved meagre results. All sides — Governments, international institutions and social groups — are again challenged to honour the Rio commitments and show more determination and responsibility on the environment.

Certainly, with regard to control of the causes of environmental degradation and long-term management of the planet's non-renewable resources, different parties have different responsibilities, but those responsibilities are shared. Among the numerous constraining factors, population and consumption remain major factors. While demographic growth presents encouraging medium- and long-term indicators, unbalanced rates of consumption persist and even increase, putting unsustainable pressure on resources.

My country, a country of the Sahel and an island nation, is particularly sensitive to certain threats to the environment, such as drought and desertification, which

were the subject of an international Convention giving particular attention to the situation in Africa. The Permanent International Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), of which Cape Verde is a member, is taking action with a visible impact, which merits continued support by its external partners.

Another factor for environmental deterioration — this time a social one — is the scourge of drugs and the human degradation to which it leads. To combat illegal drug trafficking and the laundering of the money it generates, close international cooperation is required, particularly in the exchange of information and logistical and material support. This is a global phenomenon, and the means to combat it must also be formulated globally, with national and regional foundations. The West African subregion, through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has begun concerted efforts. The Political Declaration of Praia last July laid down the basis for growing cooperation between the countries involved.

The last years of this millennium mark the end of an extraordinary period. The era which began with the fall of the Berlin Wall will go down in history as an era of an explosion of the ideals of liberty and progress such as had not been seen since the great wave of independence in the 1960s.

These gains, together with the dizzying advances of science and technology, attest to mankind's extraordinary ability to come up with imaginative answers. However, mankind has not yet freed itself from feelings of indifference and exclusion, and often even of hate. This is perhaps the major challenge as this century comes to a close.

The complete achievement of the noble objectives of the Charter would doubtless represent a decisive step towards such emancipation.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Cape Verde for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Carlos Alberto Wahnon de Carvalho Veiga, Prime Minister of the Republic of Cape Verde, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, His Excellency Mr. Algirdas Saudargas.

Mr. Saudargas (Lithuania): Allow me to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your election to your honourable post. You may count on our full support and dedication to your goals.

You, Sir, have inherited the legacy of the outgoing President, Ambassador Razali Ismail, which we can build on: friendly atmosphere, lively debates, productive spirit, strong desire for change and reform, and, last but not least, brilliant management of the Assembly's work. My Government congratulates Ambassador Razali on his outstanding performance.

I come from a country that is in the midst of comprehensive reforms. Top-to-bottom institutional changes have reshaped our society from its very roots, establishing a commonly accepted democratic way of life. Radical changes involved in introducing a market economy have borne fruit. Today, our democracy and market economy are inextricably linked with the new security and economic framework of a united Europe.

Our reform experience demonstrates that the courage to grasp the moment — to respond rapidly if and when the changing situation requires — a key for success. We have this key in our hands, and we need the determination to use it. With the end of the cold war, the fall of the bipolar system and the failure of power politics have given us a new chance to look deeper into the core of the United Nations and to reshape it in line with the needs and expectations of its Member States and for the benefit of all. The picture of the road ahead is visible.

We want this session of the General Assembly to be dominated by the programme of reforms. Lithuania's Government supports the Secretary-General's reform initiative, which is expected to spur most fundamental changes. We are confident that the Secretary-General will successfully implement that part of his programme which falls within his own responsibility.

It is unlikely that everyone will be happy about every part of the proposed reforms. We, the Member States, have to see the Secretary-General's proposals in their entirety, and, rising above narrow national interests, find a compromise on every step that brings us closer to a more focused, more efficient, more transparent and more democratic United Nations. Lithuania is ready to play an active part in achieving agreement on a United Nations structure that will reflect the nature of the United Nations mandate and its core functions: maintenance of peace and security, sustainable development and

promotion of human rights, humanitarian assistance, and social and economic progress. They should be placed within a strict time-frame. Otherwise, lack of dynamics in the negotiation process will cause a loss of direction.

What is of special concern to us is that the financial difficulties of the Organization are affecting its performance and endanger the progress of reforms. Lithuania will fulfil its financial obligations to the United Nations and urges other States to do so. At the same time, United Nations financing must reflect a State's capacity to pay. The scheme of limits has to be removed from the new scale of assessments that is to be negotiated this autumn. Lithuania continues to support the package of comprehensive proposals put forward by the European Union designed to put the Organization on a sound and predictable financial footing.

Although the reform of the Security Council started as a separate process, it is now part of the entire package of United Nations reform. It was inspired by the general acknowledgement that the time had come for the Council to reflect new realities in world politics. Today we have more nations able and willing to serve permanently on the Security Council than in the days of its inception. Two such States are Germany and Japan. Asia, Africa and Latin America, too, legitimately aspire to have new permanent seats. And there are more States whose contributions to the goals of the United Nations point to the need for greater appreciation and better accommodation of their interests.

We want a comprehensive reform of the Council whereby the number of non-permanent seats increases as well. The Group of Eastern European States, whose number has more than doubled over the past few years, deserves at least one additional seat. Our position on this is very firm.

We also need a more transparent and democratic Security Council. But, most important, the reform should continue to progress. This year's discussions have been productive, thanks to the efforts of the former President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Razali. I hope the process will retain its vigour.

In the post-confrontation era, there are far too many weapons around the world. Fortunately, today there are more tools to control the spread of the most deadly weapons. Last year we adopted the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty — a major breakthrough in nuclear disarmament, which is feasible when pursued in consecutive steps. The next step should be to ban the spread of fissile material for nuclear warheads.

The world's attention has been captured by the negotiations in Oslo on the agreement to ban one of the most inhumane weapons: anti-personnel landmines. We support these efforts, which require profound rethinking of national defence strategies in many countries, including Lithuania. Confidence-building measures and security cooperation will help humanitarian concerns reign over military purposes.

We have faith in regional and bilateral efforts to disarm. Europe has set out on the path of toughening the requirements for the stationing of conventional forces, through the adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. We support this process and believe that it can be a model for other regions.

Even though the total number of peacekeeping operations and their average size have been reduced in recent years, peacekeeping is still the key instrument available to the United Nations in discharging its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Together with Estonia and Latvia, and with Poland, Lithuania is developing joint peacekeeping units. Apart from its genuine objective of contributing to United Nations goals, this exercise is, in itself, a testimony to full understanding and cooperation among the neighbouring countries of our region.

In recent years we have witnessed an increase in the role and functions of international civilian police in peacekeeping operations. The civilian police forces can play a major role, through assistance to local police forces, in rebuilding national police and judicial systems, in restoring civil order, in supporting the rule of law and in facilitating national reconciliation. The need for assistance from international civilian police is likely to increase. It can be met by properly functioning United Nations standby arrangements, which are designed to expand the rapid-deployment capacity of the Organization. Lithuania has decided to join the United Nations system of standby arrangements for peacekeeping operations. Later today, I shall submit to the Secretary-General a detailed description of our permanently available contribution, including well-trained police officers.

Nations around the world are being challenged by certain phenomena which know no boundaries and which can be tackled only by joint action. Fighting international crime, drug trafficking and terrorism and ensuring environmental protection and humanitarian aid are among such challenges.

Lithuania wholeheartedly supports the Secretary-General's reform effort to strengthen, through the United Nations entities in Vienna, the Organization's capacity coherently and systematically to address threats to the stability and development of society created by transnational crime in all its manifestations. For its part, the Government of Lithuania is determined to enhance regional structures combating transnational organized crime as well as fully to implement bilateral, regional and multilateral agreements in this area.

We also look forward to the special session of the General Assembly in 1998, which should enable the international community to develop new and improved strategies to address the problem of illicit narcotic drugs.

Although the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly was not a milestone of success and ended with few commitments, we strongly believe that the political will demonstrated by the presence of so many Heads of State and Government will be translated into action. The next occasion to demonstrate the seriousness of our intentions to protect the environment and to agree on specific targets for reducing the emission of greenhouse gases, which were not realized at the special session, will be the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Kyoto, Japan, this December.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will afford a great occasion to see what has been done and what can be done about the protection of and respect for basic international human rights.

We welcome the appointment of Mrs. Mary Robinson as the High Commissioner for Human Rights and express our support for the structural reforms of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Centre for Human Rights. Internal restructuring of the United Nations human rights organs should go hand in hand with close cooperation in human rights issues between the United Nations and such regional arrangements as the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and others.

Illegal migration and trafficking in migrants threaten stability in Central and Eastern Europe. We believe that treaties on readmission between the States of the region could be a key instrument against these threats. Lithuania urges the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States that have not yet done so to accede to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and to further strengthen national institutions responsible for the management of migration flows.

We believe in a regional approach to regional issues. We praise the United Nations reliance on regional organizations. The Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe is a good example of what a regional institution with a limited budget can do rather than placing the burden on the United Nations. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is another good example. The record of the two organizations in the former Yugoslavia is much better than what could have been achieved had the United Nations alone dealt with the war.

Along with other measures towards a more consolidated peace, good-neighbourly relations have become vital for regional security and stability. We have done our utmost to establish and maintain friendly relations with our neighbours, while simultaneously taking practical steps towards integration into the European Union and NATO. The accession of Lithuania to European and transatlantic institutions will have a significant impact on lasting security and stability. Yesterday the Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Primakov, proposed a different security model of our region. However, creating a substitute for transatlantic integration is not in line with our vision. The international Vilnius conference entitled, "Coexistence of Nations and Good Neighbourhood Relations — A Guarantee of Security and Stability in Europe", for which Lithuanian and Polish Presidents Algirdas Brazauskas and Aleksander Kwasniewski acted as hosts in September of this year and which was attended by 12 Heads of State and Government, received joint greetings from the Presidents of Germany and France, Roman Herzog and Jacques Chirac. They wrote:

> "It is time to foster a culture of cooperation and dialogue all over Europe and to harness the political energies of our peoples to bring about reconciliation and understanding ... Only in a spirit of unity, community, friendship and good- neighbourly relations, as well as mutual understanding, will we be able to build the future of our continent."

Here at the United Nations, I am tempted to quote this sentence, but with the last word, "continent," in the plural.

The President: I now call upon the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Venezuela, His Excellency Mr. Miguel Angel Burelli Rivas.

Mr. Burelli Rivas (Venezuela) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Speaking here on behalf of my country, I wish to congratulate the new Secretary-General of the Organization, Mr. Kofi Annan, who, after nine months in his post, now for the first time faces the responsibility of a session of the General Assembly, a session that is likely to be noteworthy and hard-working. Given his vast experience, he is well aware that the prestige and influence of his important post derive from the impartiality that places him above all pressure of interests and raises him to the permanent status of arbitrator for all and a symbol of the Organization.

Mr. Panou (Togo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

I also wish to offer my congratulations to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, on his appointment as President of this session of the General Assembly.

The pace of events today means that subjects that we considered just last year seem obsolete. Nevertheless, as we have still not found solutions to the most pressing problems facing the international community, it is logical to keep returning to those that are of concern to every member of that community and to the community as a whole, which now finds itself in the midst of the most rapid process of change in history.

Inevitably, therefore, we will again go over, for example, human rights, the rule of law, free elections, the war on drugs, corruption, disarmament, terrorism and other compelling issues that crop up constantly among our concerns and in our work nowadays.

I must place on record the fact that the Government of Venezuela has taken measures on all these issues to ensure increased respect for human rights, to wage war on drugs and to promote further disarmament and assist in the fight against corruption. Naturally, it is not easy for any country to show a clean record. A Government's good intentions as regards human rights will always immediately come up against recurring internal violence and still untamed unruly elements, as in the example constantly presented by the audiovisual media in developed countries. But the will exists and an effort is being made to make Government agencies increasingly aware of our resolve to protect guarantee human rights.

I wish to highlight the work done by the first United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ecuador, Mr. José Ayala-Lasso, and welcome the new High Commissioner, the former President of Ireland, Mrs. Mary Robinson, to whom my country wishes every success in the stimulating but difficult task ahead of her.

With regard to corruption, terrorism and disarmament, my country, which proposed and was able to gain approval for the Inter-American Convention — the first of its kind in the world — in March 1996, remains steadfast in its efforts to ensure that every country is aware of the need to punish wrongdoing in government, wrongdoing that has tended to be treated with great indulgence. It may not be possible to eradicate corruption, but timely punishment — by ending impunity — will make such action risky.

We have been enthusiastic supporters of all initiatives aimed at limiting the arms trade, in addition to being aware that there are free markets often beyond Government control, we are concerned that the industrialized countries, by lifting embargoes in this field, may begin moving towards the opposite extreme and promote the sale of weapons everywhere, under pressure from the military industry, which has an extremely powerful lobby.

My country has resolutely backed the programme to eliminate landmines, hundreds of millions of which have been irresponsibly and thoughtlessly scattered in territories on every continent, daily taking their toll of many innocent victims, particularly children, whose mutilation by landmines is a constant reminder that we need to ensure justice for humankind.

The fact that Venezuela has a neighbour where illegal drugs continue to be planted, processed and sold places us in the unfortunate position of being part of the supply route and within an area influenced by drug money. That is why the Government of Venezuela has taken every precaution to keep this danger to a minimum. It fights trafficking on land and sea and in the air, and has intercepted large shipments of drugs. The official in charge of all Government action against this powerful enemy of humankind has been given the rank of Minister.

It goes without saying that we look forward hopefully to the next special session of the General Assembly, on illegal drug trafficking, to be held at the request of Mexico. We hope that it will produce clear solutions that will enable us to wage a more successful war on this scourge and, above all, put an end to money laundering, where Government efforts have so far been least successful.

As the threat of ever more pitiless and atrocious acts of terrorism has spread around the world and, to no small extent, here on our American continent, Venezuela has taken an interest in ensuring that the international community is made increasingly aware of its responsibilities in joint efforts to approve a convention for the suppression of terrorist bombings. That convention is currently being considered by the General Assembly, in a body that should be completing its work shortly.

When the Inter-American Convention against Corruption was approved, we voiced our hope that, given that the disregard for of ethical standards that has fostered this crime has been a worldwide and not a strictly American phenomenon, the subject would one day be taken up by the United Nations in order to produce an international convention giving voice to the concern felt by all countries over this problem and harnessing the general willingness to put an end to impunity. The day seems to have come when the Member States of this Organization will work together to do away with the tolerance encountered on all continents towards this canker afflicting politics and administration; a canker whose breeding ground is not underdevelopment, but the moral decay of the State and society; a canker that seriously and increasingly hinders the trade that is a necessary part of economic globalization.

My Government has welcomed the idea of changes not only in the structure, but even in the philosophy of this 50-year-old Organization. Since the lives of the peoples of this world have undergone such profound changes, it would be inexcusable for the United Nations, which represents them all, to remain untouched.

We have considered the various plans for reforms and watched the efforts made by the outgoing President of the General Assembly over these past few months to achieve some, at least, of the essential changes to the system during his term in office. And, although we believe this issue to be both timely and urgent, we do not feel that there is imminent consensus on the suggested changes which, above all, relate to membership on the Security Council. In any case, it is only fair to recognize the serious efforts being made to end the stagnation within this Organization and launch the debate that is just beginning.

Venezuela supports an increase in the number of permanent Members on the Security Council, provided there is no discrimination of any kind and that there is due regard for the interests of the international community, including fair representation of all geographical regions, in line with other new circumstances.

We feel that there are great expectations and high hopes that the Secretariat will become more efficient and that the Organization's burden of projected expenditures may be eased. It is also essential that Member States pay their contributions on time. None of us can refuse to honour a freely accepted obligation, nor make payment conditional in a way that presents a threat to the equality of States and the dignity of the world forum of which we are a part.

My country's position, however, is not limited to this alone. It goes beyond an analysis of the opportunities and rules of the veto to the elimination of the veto altogether. It has to do with the reform of the Secretariat itself and with economic and social issues, especially funding for development, as envisaged in the relevant document. That is why we feel that consideration should be given to the ideas recently expressed by both the Group of 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement as regards not only this subject, but also consensus on the other reforms.

Venezuela supports the convening of an international conference on financing for development, in cooperation with international financial institutions, to propose innovative and bold mechanisms in this area. Such mechanisms must include the mobilization of capital resources for investment in non-industrialized countries while at the same time, opening the door to the opportunities offered by the private sector.

Non-governmental organizations — increasingly active in today's world — could contribute even more towards attainment of the aims of the Charter of United Nations in this field of action. My country has launched an intensive round of consultations with these organizations in what it has called a "Dialogue between senior Government and non-governmental organizations", so as to draw up a plan for the promotion, protection and observance of human rights in Venezuela.

We welcomed the Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses as a well-conceived initiative. That is why Venezuela played an active role in the various stages of the drafting of the document, which required years of work, and led to the successful conclusion of a document that includes virtually all the provisions on this subject that exist in international law. My country signed the Convention yesterday and we call upon other countries to do the same.

As Venezuela has always been in favour of the establishment of an international criminal court, we wish to draw attention to what the international community has done to deal with and punish international crimes against peace and security, first with the creation of ad hoc courts and then with the creation of a permanent body such as that court. By thus institutionalizing and centralizing the political will of States, we will help prevent the possibility of the winners in a conflict from being tempted to become the judges of the defeated.

This seems the appropriate time and place to mention the Ibero-American community of which Venezuela is a part and the five hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's only landing on continental America in his voyages.

Since 1991, 500 years after the discovery of America, thanks to an initiative of the King of Spain, the 21 countries that proudly share the honour of being members of the Ibero-American community have met once a year, in a different city each time. I say "proudly" because in their colonial endeavours both Spain and Portugal took a missionary approach. While imposing their political power and territorial government, they also disseminated Christianity and passed on with conviction their European civilization and culture. Thus in Spanish and Portuguese America, the mixing of blood and cultures took root, making our world a different one, a world characterized by social egalitarianism, religious tolerance and a strong and deeply rooted freedom. The effects of this situation, which defines and unites American existence from north to south, makes this community stand out. It does not set it apart from others, but, in this era of globalization, it affirms the very particular features of Ibero-American identity.

This idea has evolved well, beginning in Guadalajara, then continuing in Madrid, Salvador de Bahia, Cartagena, Bariloche and Santiago. The seventh summit meeting will be held on Margarita Island in my country.

As the host country suggests the key topic for discussion at each meeting, the President of Venezuela, Mr. Rafael Caldera, has proposed the general heading of "Ethical values of democracy", a suggestion that has been accepted with great enthusiasm.

The Governments of Venezuela and the other 20 countries of Ibero-America insist that it is not enough to have formal democracy if corruption is rampant, if inefficiency persists, if justice is not effective, or if the action taken by the democratic sectors is neither satisfactory nor transparent.

Thus, this general topic encompasses other very specific issues having to do with social justice, human rights, electoral transparency elections, the sincerity of political parties and, unavoidably, truth in information. That is the nucleus of the agenda for the meeting to be held on 8 and 9 November on Margarita Island.

It is not out of place to explain to this Assembly that there are good reasons for this agenda. The economic changes and the political upheavals of our world have wreaked havoc on the set of values that was, until recently, the foundation on which people's lives rested.

The weakness of social justice is pathetic. In more than a few countries, unavoidable macroeconomic adjustments have affected vast numbers of people who are victims of injustice and who are unable, both mentally and physically, of coping with these changes, leaving them even worse off than they were before. Something must be done to improve the lot of these multitudes during a transition that, although necessary, is still painful.

The subject of human rights, which I mentioned briefly at the beginning of my statement, is vitally important, and it would not be surprising if some day it were to replace "democracy" as a term and as a concept. Certain statements on this subject may have been exaggerated in the heat of the moment. But the truth is that we must march firmly forward towards a time when every human being, without exception, feels for his fellow man the same respect that he asks for himself. This is a matter of education, training and will on the part of Governments, so that the bad examples from the more developed countries that are passed on by the media do not lead the developing countries to continue violating these rights.

Despite the fact that democracy has taken root in virtually all the countries in our region — seemingly the desideratum of our times — it now faces a variety of dangers, such as elections rigged by international organized crime. The most specific and dangerous case has to do with the influential role that drug trafficking and money laundering now play in elections, allowing crime to become closely entwined with political power.

My country's position in this regard is to warn political parties to make sure their electoral campaigns are

transparent by keeping these campaigns short and to the point so as to avoid any improper financial influence.

Democracy is, by its very nature, a system of political parties. There is no democratic system without political parties. Yet it is obvious that the downfall of democracy is often due to carelessness on the part of the political parties on which it is based, when, setting aside the ethics of service, ideology and efficiency, they are tempted to take advantage of the resources of the State using the pretext of lengthy, complex and costly election campaigns. It would seem that the time has come to return to the old political ideas or to invent new means of expression in order to heal and revitalize democracy.

Many people reacted by voicing doubts and fears when the subject of the people's right to truthful information was raised. Media groups have even claimed that this proposal is full of hidden dangers. Nevertheless, the straightforward intent of this proposal is to strengthen the influence of the media at a time when they are virtually the first estate. We consider this right to be the counterpart to the media's right to carry out their activities in absolute freedom, given the fact that society legitimately aspires, in turn, to be properly, accurately and truthfully informed.

In an era in which the media have the most amazing technologies at their disposal — such as those providing instantaneous communication — there can be no explanation for information that distorts, embellishes or tampers with the truth. All the power that we give the media, essential for the values of democracy, would be lost if the media were to step outside their role and begin voicing opinions instead of reporting or made themselves part of the day-to-day debate of ideas.

What Venezuela hopes to achieve by this debate is to make clear the responsibilities that each actor must play in a democracy, and the media are very important actors. That is the reason for this initiative: to warn and caution them, not by suggesting rules, but by appealing to a sense of responsibility, prompted by their own conscience, with regard to the worthy part that information must play in building a safe and trusting society.

Following on from comments I made at this year's Ibero-American Summit in Venezuela, I wish to mention the five-hundredth anniversary of the day when Christopher Columbus set foot on continental America, in August 1498, at the Paria Peninsula in Venezuela. Until then the feats of exploration by the discoverer of the New World had been limited to the islands of the Caribbean. He was not absolutely sure that he was actually standing on continental soil when in 1498 he reached Macuro, a small village on the eastern coast of Venezuela, but he certainly wondered as he witnessed the thrust of a strong current that overcame the gentle waves and gave proof of the presence of a great river, the Orinoco. This was an extremely important event for my country, which we plan to commemorate properly. It was the only time the great admiral stood on *terra firma*, which he called "Land of Grace". In making this announcement, we hope the global community will join us in our celebration.

In closing, I wish to express Venezuela's faith in the ability of the Organization to act as a permanent arbitrator for peace and development. There is a greater need every day for the United Nations to act as the voice and conscience of humanity, but never as the spokesperson or tool of any group, region or interest other than the community which created it and of which it is the core.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of Argentina, His Excellency Mr. Guido di Tella, on whom I now call.

Mr. Di Tella (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): In recent years we have, happily, drawn closer to the ideals enshrined in the preamble of our Charter. We have taken substantial strides towards the ideal of peace and security; strengthened and broadened the observance of human rights; enhanced and developed international law and widened the scope of international penal law, in particular; and laid the foundations for greater responsibility by States in the advancement of social progress.

However, even as we draw closer to these goals, we see rapid changes in our countries and in the world which present a new and complex challenge for the Organization. The challenge begins when we note that the benefits of globalization fall short of being able to alleviate the situation of extreme deprivation from which more than a quarter of the world's population suffers. Similarly, we see more clearly new threats to security and development, such as drug trafficking, terrorism, corruption, and irresponsible assaults upon the environment.

The process of reform undertaken by Secretary-General Kofi Annan must first and foremost identify what is the essential role of the United Nations. We believe that it unquestionably continues to be the maintenance of

international peace and security. In order to achieve this we must bring about a world where sustainable development is possible and where the norm is the rule of law; respect for human rights, including respect for the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities; and non-discrimination by reason of race, religion, gender or anything else.

The United Nations, through the General Assembly, must continue to be in the vanguard on all these issues, playing the role which in the past enabled it to overcome the scepticism of the times and successfully to combat colonialism, champion nuclear non-proliferation, and, even more important, alert the world to the grave risks of environmental pollution, marginalization, poverty and that new form of moral pollution: corruption.

Although, on the whole, reform has aroused feelings of hope, we must overcome the present climate of scepticism and support the Secretary-General. In a world which today is increasingly marked by globalization, the autonomy which formerly characterized State action has been considerably limited. This obliges us to reassess the classical concept of sovereignty, by which I mean flexible and dynamic — not static — reassessment. Argentina has participated with conviction in the process of reform and commits itself to continue to work actively in its implementation.

The question of the Middle East is going through a difficult phase. The peace process begun in Madrid in 1991 must necessarily continue, with fulfilment of the Oslo and Washington Agreements.

We fully support the determined efforts made some days ago by the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Mrs. Madeleine Albright. We are certain that time will show that those efforts were timely and well-directed.

Our country likewise firmly supports the system-wide Programme of Action for the economic recovery and development of Africa, as well as the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa launched by the Secretary-General in March 1996. We attach particular importance to the mobilization of financial resources for the African continent, and we note with satisfaction the first signs of renewed activity in some very important areas of that continent.

With regard to international security, we welcome the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which we hope shortly to ratify. Likewise, we extend our unqualified support to the Ottawa process to ban anti-personnel landmines. Our commitment to this noble initiative was made manifest in 1994, when we offered to assume the task of removing the mines laid in the Malvinas Islands. We laid those mines ourselves and thus felt a sense of responsibility. We hope that we shall soon be able to achieve the agreement that will allow us to complete that task.

A lasting peace requires United Nations contingents endowed with the capacity to deploy rapidly and effectively. Accordingly, Argentina, together with other countries, is working to improve mechanisms of deployment. In this context, allow me also to recall that, next year, Argentina will mark the fortieth anniversary of its participation in peacekeeping operations. That is a great many years.

The magnitude of the adverse consequences for individuals of current conflicts requires us to exert our utmost efforts with regard to humanitarian assistance. Such assistance constitutes an indispensable element in peace-building. Accordingly, the "White Helmets" initiative has made possible a growing mobilization of human and financial resources, bringing about a healthy reassessment of humanitarian assistance criteria and procedures.

In order to consolidate a lasting peace, we must not allow impunity to prevail for crimes that offend the conscience of humankind. The creation by the Security Council of tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda is a recognition that justice and law are inseparable components of the system of collective security. Argentina firmly supports the creation of a general and permanent international criminal court. We trust that the Rome conference in 1998 will make possible the realization of this initiative.

Let me also say that the Argentine Government firmly intends to pursue its struggle against the abusive consumption of psychotropic substances and illicit narcotics trafficking, as well as related offenses.

In the subregional context, we are proud that the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) continues to grow in both the commercial and political spheres, which are interrelated, and to contribute to advancing integration in the hemisphere. MERCOSUR is a clear case of open regionalism. It has not resulted in the distortion or diversion of trade but has, rather, generated trade both between the countries of the region and with countries outside it. Argentina, jointly with its other

MERCOSUR partners, is active in the formation of the American Free Trade Area (AFTA). MERCOSUR has introduced a proposal for negotiation of AFTA based on a phased approach.

With regard to regional security, Argentina has been a leader in reducing residual tensions in the area. It has contributed to the attainment of such cherished goals for the nations of South America as the resolution of border problems in a climate of confidence with our neighbours and by promoting common positions in support of strengthened democracy and political and economic stability. Accordingly, we have, through the Mechanism for Consultation and Concerted Political Action of the Rio Group, been promoting the Declaration on the Defence of Democracy, to which we attach great importance as one more means to advance peace and security — goals that can be achieved only with representative democracy. We also welcome the inclusion of Bolivia and Chile as full members of the Mercosur Mechanism for Consultation and Concerted Political Action.

With our neighbours, friends and partners, we are pursuing a deepening of the dialogue on security and defence. We are adjusting it to the new international and regional reality, convinced that security is enhanced through integration. Indeed, the basis of security in the Southern Cone is the friendship and cordiality of its countries. In this context, military cooperation has increased, with positive results for transparency and mutual confidence-building. As a result of these efforts, Latin America today can point with pride to the peace and harmony that prevails among its States.

There remains, however, in the South Atlantic, an important unresolved issue: the question of the Malvinas Islands. I reaffirm once again the legitimate rights of the Republic of Argentina in that dispute and its appeal for a peaceful and lasting solution.

In keeping with the repeated appeals of this General Assembly and the Decolonization Committee, we believe that it is imperative to resume negotiations on all aspects of the question of the Malvinas Islands. No Member of the United Nations should evade the obligation to resolve a dispute by peaceful means as laid down in the Charter of this Organization. We call for the parties to sit at the negotiating table and discuss all the relevant issues.

We have made too much progress with the United Kingdom to avoid addressing this issue. We have made very important strides in building our bilateral relationship with the United Kingdom, which are reflected in heightened economic, commercial and cultural relations between the two countries. We have recreated a climate of mutual trust in the South-West Atlantic, which enables us today to cooperate in the conservation of living resources and in the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons. Undoubtedly, these activities would gain substantial impetus from the resumption of direct links between the mainland and the islands, which have proven to be most beneficial in the past. Nothing, however, replaces human contact between individuals.

I trust that the new British Government will heed our appeal and that of the international community to pursue a dialogue without preconditions with a view to finding a definitive solution to the sovereignty dispute over the Malvinas Islands. To the islanders, I once again reiterate our firm commitment to fully respect their way of life, culture and institutions, as stated in our national Constitution.

The Decolonization Committee, which has historically played a decisive role in this sphere, has shown itself to be the appropriate forum to continue addressing the situation of the Malvinas Islands and other dependent territories. Accordingly, the six countries that make up the MERCOSUR Mechanism for Consultation and Concerted Political Action have reaffirmed the importance of the work of the Committee of 24 on the decolonization process, which has not yet been completed. We trust that the Committee will maintain its effectiveness to the full.

Another fundamental issue is the composition of the Security Council, which in 1945 was consonant with the reality prevailing at the end of the Second World War. That is no longer the case, however. On the eve of the twenty-first century, we should not design a model that only adds new discriminations to those we have inherited. That would be a conceptual mistake. Argentina, while understanding the position of each Member State on this matter, is of the view that there is not yet a general agreement concerning the increase in the number of permanent members. We all agree that the reform of the Security Council should make it a more democratic and representative body. To reach that goal, each region will need to arrive at a compromise without being pressured or rushed.

In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Summit of Heads of State of the Rio Group has agreed that the region itself will have to decide how to fill the

seats assigned to it. Argentina is of the view that an open-ended mechanism of rotation should be established that will enable the participation of all those States that have shown their commitment to and respect for the Charter. This would avoid discrimination against those States that, like Argentina, bear greater financial responsibilities. In short, the Argentine position is aimed solely at promoting the ample participation of all States of the region, without any exclusion whatsoever.

I must say, however, that there is more to this matter than the increase in the number of members. Methods of work and procedures also need to be updated. In this context, I concur with the comments made by the representative of New Zealand.

It is our firm conviction that reform of the United Nations must necessarily be built upon two fundamental pillars. First, it must respond to the requirements and expectations of the international community. Secondly, it must reflect a general agreement among the Member States. It is only in this way that the Organization will retain its relevance in the twenty-first century.

The Acting President *(interpretation from French)*: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Kwamena Ahwoi, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs of Ghana.

Mr. Ahwoi (Ghana): The delegation of Ghana congratulates His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. His long experience in the affairs of this Organization and the great qualities which he brings to this high office assure us that under his wise guidance the work of this session will be fruitful and constructive. To that end my delegation pledges to him its full support and cooperation.

My delegation also wishes to pay a special tribute to his distinguished predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Razali Ismail, who conducted the business of the fifty-first session with remarkable zeal and efficiency. The promptitude and energy with which he discharged his responsibilities as President has left an enduring imprint on the work of this Organization.

To our distinguished Secretary-General and my compatriot, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, we wish to express our deep appreciation for his sterling qualities of leadership. The people of Ghana are indeed grateful to the world community for having chosen a son to head this very high and important body. Barely nine months after assuming his onerous responsibilities, Kofi Annan has demonstrated an indefatigable energy and commitment to the reform and efficient management of the Organization to enable it to measure up to the purposes and objectives of its existence. We pledge to him our continued unflinching support.

At the fifty-first session, Member States warmly welcomed the conclusion of the Pelindaba and Bangkok Treaties establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa and South-East Asia respectively. We also welcomed the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which has since been signed by the vast majority of States, including my own. We view these as progressive steps on the road to nuclear disarmament. We therefore renew our call on the nuclear-weapon States to cooperate with the rest of the international community for the commencement and early conclusion of multilateral negotiations on a universal and binding convention prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons, and mandating the destruction of the existing stockpiles.

We make these appeals not as an annual ritual but because of our deep conviction that the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, will go a long way to promote international peace and security, a principal purpose for which this Organization was established.

While weapons of mass destruction deserve the priority attention accorded them by this Assembly, the question of conventional weapons cannot be ignored either. The illicit transfer and use of this category of armaments are a source of great concern, since they constitute a threat to the stability of States and fuel the numerous conflicts which bedevil the world today, particularly in Africa. They also provide terrorists, drug barons and other criminals the means with which to pursue their illegal activities. We must adopt all available means to curb the illicit traffic. In the same vein, we support ongoing international initiatives to conclude a treaty banning the production, transfer and use of anti-personnel landmines, which continue to kill and maim innocent people and disrupt the economic and social life of millions, long after the end of the conflicts in which they were laid.

Though the end of the cold war has greatly reduced the threat of another global war, which twice in this century brought untold sorrow to mankind, intra-country conflicts and civil wars continue to wreak havoc in

several countries, with resultant loss of lives, destruction of national infrastructure, displacement of innocent persons and outflow of refugees into neighbouring countries. In Afghanistan, Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone and the Republic of the Congo, we see the havoc caused by this new trend and its potential threat to regional and subregional security.

We in Africa are all the more concerned. For while the international community is prompt to react to conflicts in regions of economic or geo-strategic interest to the rich and industrialized world, conflicts in some developing countries, particularly in Africa, I am sorry to say, fail to elicit the same degree of response. Thus, peacekeeping, which is a primary function of this Organization, has also fallen prey to geo-strategic parochial considerations. We hasten to warn that such double standards threaten the concept of collective security which constitutes the very foundation of this Organization.

In the West African subregion, we have endeavoured to fill the gap left by international inertia and selectivity. After nearly eight years of fratricidal civil war and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) intervention in Liberia, countries of the subregion, with only the limited assistance of the international community, finally succeeded in supervising the conduct of presidential and legislative elections in the country in July 1997, under conditions generally acknowledged to be free and fair.

We are happy to welcome the worthy representatives of the elected Government of Liberia to this Assembly. For true and lasting peace in that country, we urge the international community to stand by the people of Liberia as they set out on the difficult road of national reconstruction. We are proud to have been part of the process to restore peace and legitimacy in Liberia, and pray that the Liberian Government and people will continue on the path of national reconciliation in order to consolidate the hard-won peace, which is vital for social and economic development.

While we applaud the return of peace to Liberia, we deplore the onset of violence, disorder and destruction following the unjustified overthrow of the democratically elected Government of President Tejan Kabbah in Sierra Leone. We call on the leaders of the coup to heed the unequivocal condemnation of their act by the international community and cooperate with the efforts of ECOWAS to restore constitutional order in Sierra Leone.

In recent years, my delegation has had cause to express its concern and regret at the continued imposition of unjust sanctions on Libya by the Security Council, in defiance of the expressed wish of the vast majority of States represented in the League of Arab States, the Organization of African Unity and the Non-Aligned Movement. We note that Libya has fully met the requirements of Security Council resolution 731 (1992) and is willing to cooperate with the other parties concerned in the dispute. We urge the Security Council to revisit the issue and ensure a peaceful solution of the conflict and an end to the sanctions.

We also reiterate the call of the Non-Aligned Movement and other States on the United States of America to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial measures and actions unilaterally imposed on Cuba, in contravention of the United Nations Charter and all principles of international law.

We urge the people of Korea to work together in peace to realize their aspirations. Since the end of the cold war peace on the peninsula has needlessly been under threat on a number of occasions.

On the question of Western Sahara, we maintain our confidence in the power of direct dialogue, under the auspices of this Organization, as the best means by which the Settlement Plan can be revived to enable the Sahrawi people to exercise their right to self-determination, through a free, fair and impartial referendum. The news that the Secretary-General's personal envoy, in the worthy person of His Excellency Mr. James Baker III, has succeeded in brokering a compromise agreement through such direct talks is reassuring, and we hope that very soon, this long, drawn-out conflict will be amenable to successful resolution.

May I also avail myself of this opportunity to express my Government's regret that the Middle East peace process has been put in grave jeopardy by the actions of the Israeli Government, which, defying international outcry, continues its settlement activities in East Jerusalem. For these are the very actions which encourage extremists among the Palestinians to organize terrorist acts against the Israeli population. We would also urge the Palestinian leadership to continue more assiduously in its efforts to achieve the objectives of their treaty with Israel through non-confrontational means.

Many a representative has drawn attention to the continued and widespread growth of the global economy

as we move towards the close of the century and to the broadening of the reach of economic growth in developing countries to include an increasing number of low-income countries. Indeed, many African countries have achieved stronger growth of output and incomes in 1996 and 1997. This encouraging trend has been achieved through the adoption and pursuit by Governments of policies and measures aimed at ensuring, among others, macroeconomic stability, inflows of foreign direct investment, open and free markets and stable and transparent legal and regulatory frameworks.

However, it is pertinent also to point out that despite these efforts, many African countries, and especially the least developed countries, continue to face important policy challenges, particularly in the areas of enhancing resource mobilization and allocation, strengthening savings and investment and financing development. The difficulties inherent in these challenges are compounded by the adverse impact of globalization and liberalization. These countries have not participated in, nor benefited from, globalization. On the contrary, they have become even more marginalized in the global economy for the very simple reason that they lack the physical, financial and human resources as well as the institutional infrastructure necessary for effective competition and integration in the international markets.

In specific terms our countries, despite various structural reforms, have been unable to attract in sufficient quantities the necessary capital inflows for investment, and are confronted at the same time with domestic supply-side constraints which limit our export potential, an unsustainable debt which swallows a great part of our national income, and declining levels of official development assistance, among others. The "prosperity-poverty" gap, or gulf, between the haves and the have-nots is ever more yawning.

Under these circumstances, what we need is a new development strategy based on genuine partnership between the developed and developing countries and which takes a holistic view of development, combining within itself all the tools of development, including trade and investment as well as official development assistance and South/South cooperation. Such a strategy will also necessitate the democratization of international relations, particularly in the economic sphere; the establishment of open, equitable and transparent international regimes; the creation of fair opportunities for all; and the protection of the weakest members of our community.

It is in this context that we welcome the successful conclusion and adoption of the Agenda for Development, which is intended to serve as an initial framework for renewing and strengthening the partnership for development on the basis of mutual benefits and genuine interdependence. While acknowledging and affirming our commitment to the primacy of national policies and measures to achieve our development goals, we wish to stress the importance of the fulfilment by all parties of the global commitments aimed at supplementing national efforts. In this connection, we express the hope that the commitments and internationally agreed targets reached at recent major United Nations conferences will be fully implemented by all parties. It is also our view that the United Nations must be strengthened and adequately equipped to carry out its important role in development.

In seeking to achieve our goals, we the countries of the developing world need to cooperate more among ourselves as a means of strengthening our self-reliance and complementing international development cooperation. We therefore need to strive to enhance cooperation at all levels — bilateral, subregional, regional and interregional — in the important areas of trade, investment, finance, science and technology, environment, human resources development, and information and communications. This, in the view of my delegation, will constitute an important strategy for facilitating the effective participation of developing countries in the global economy.

The review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 last June revealed worsening trends for sustainable development, as well as the continued deterioration of the state of the global environment as a result of the failure of the international community to fulfil the commitments it undertook in 1992. This is a sad state of affairs. But even sadder still was the failure of the review session to make any significant progress on the critical issues of Agenda 21, owing to the unwillingness of Member States to establish time-bound and quantified commitments. It is absolutely necessary that we all recommit ourselves to the global partnership established at Rio in 1992 and to the fulfilment of the obligations voluntarily assumed under Agenda 21.

Ghana has in various forums indicated its support for the establishment of an international criminal court. We are gratified that the Preparatory Committee for the establishment of the Court made significant progress in that direction at its last two sessions. We hope that with the same determination and spirit of compromise which

has characterized the work of the Preparatory Committee since its inception, the establishment of the Court will soon become a reality. We wish to recognize the useful contributions of the various non-governmental organizations which have worked closely with governmental delegations on several difficult aspects of the proposed international criminal court.

Progress on the Law of the Sea also deserves mention. With the establishment of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, all institutions envisaged by the Convention have now been put in place. It is our hope that adequate resources will be made available to these institutions to enable them fully to attain the objectives for which they were set up. It is also our hope that cooperation between the appropriate United Nations agencies and developing countries in the sphere of the Law of the Sea will be intensified to enable developing countries fully to utilize the benefits conferred on them by the Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The critical financial situation of the Organization is a major source of concern to my delegation, as it places our Organization in jeopardy at a time of challenge and of opportunity to promote the objectives and purposes of the Organization. It is regrettable that a number of countries, including some of the largest contributors, are neither paying their contributions nor making good on their arrears, while some even wittingly aggravate the situation by attaching unacceptable conditions or benchmarks to the discharge of their Charter obligations in this regard. My delegation strongly believes that support for the United Nations must be demonstrated not only by an eagerness to promote reforms but more importantly by the willingness of Member States to pay all their assessed contributions promptly, fully and unconditionally to ensure that the Organization is financially sound and can meet its mandates and other commitments.

Ted Turner, an individual with no obligation whatsoever to support the United Nations, has demonstrated support in a dramatic and yet effective manner. He has offered to pay the United Nations $1 billion over 10 years. What excuse has any country got, then, to say, "We will not pay", or "We will pay only if ..."? On behalf of His Excellency the President of Ghana and of the people of Ghana, I say thank you to Ted Turner for showing us the way, for pricking our consciences and for being such a good citizen of the world.

Today at the fifty-second session, perhaps more so than ever before, the General Assembly is confronted with the complex problem of the reform of our Organization. On the threshold of a new millennium, the United Nations cannot continue to conduct its business as usual. It has to adopt bold and imaginative measures to overhaul its structure and working methods with a view to removing the obstacles that impede its effectiveness not only as an instrument for promoting international peace and security but also as an indispensable agent for resolving the world's socio-economic problems.

It is in this context that Ghana has carefully studied the Secretary-General's wide-ranging and far-reaching proposals presented to Member States for their consideration and reaction. We warmly congratulate the Secretary-General on his bold initiative. The Secretary-General has thrown a momentous challenge to all of us, and we should do everything possible to measure up to the test by manifesting the necessary breadth of vision and objectivity of outlook. The United Nations remains the only international body available to us in our search for peace, progress and prosperity as well as in the resolution of differences among nations.

For us as a nation, we are particularly interested in the new sense of purpose and dynamism that the proposals seek to inject into United Nations development activities to make them more coherent and output-oriented. We support the setting up of an effective machinery to study the various proposals and how to implement them, and we stand ready to participate in any such effort.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Lena Hjelm-Wallén, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden.

Mrs. Hjelm-Wallén (Sweden): I sincerely congratulate the Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly, a most crucial task which I trust he will execute in a most productive and creative manner.

Let me also record my admiration and praise for the way in which his predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail, performed his demanding mission during the whole of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. He laid a unique foundation on the basis of which we must now make advances towards a better United Nations.

I refer to the statement made yesterday by the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg on behalf of all

members of the European Union; my Government fully subscribes to that statement.

On the threshold of the new millennium, profound changes are affecting the lives of nations and individuals. Many are benefitting from open international relations. Others feel marginalized politically and economically. And all too many countries are still threatened by persistent poverty, social injustice and domestic strife.

We need a strong United Nations to counter these forces, which separate nations and tear them apart. We need a renewed United Nations to focus on the tasks for which it was established, and to meet the new challenges of today and of tomorrow.

This is why we need fundamental United Nations reform: not piecemeal improvements, but major change. This is why Sweden wholeheartedly endorses the reform proposals presented by the Secretary-General. We give our support as an active participant in all spheres of United Nations activity and as a major contributor to its development funds and programmes.

United Nations reform is not a cost-cutting exercise. Its aim must be to make the Organization strong, effective and efficient, focusing on its core activities and ready to meet its future challenges. The Swedish Government supports the proposal that efficiency savings should be used for development.

The United Nations cannot be reformed under the threat of political and financial crisis. It is simply not acceptable that Member States should set conditions for fulfilling Charter obligations. The Swedish Government urges all debtors — including the main debtor, the United States — to settle their accounts before the end of this year and to pay their assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions.

Securing a sound and viable financial basis must be an integral part of reform efforts. The idea of establishing a revolving credit fund could be considered as an emergency step. We should also enact measures to reverse the current trend of late payment. Article 19 of the Charter should be applied more strictly. It is also time to agree on a new scale of assessments based on capacity to pay. A realistic proposal has been presented by the European Union.

We, the Member States, should provide political direction for the reform process. We should take an overall view of United Nations reform, and avoid getting trapped in details. We are fully aware that there will be further steps: reform is a process, not a one-time event.

Today, I will emphasize the need to strengthen and reform the United Nations in four key areas: peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, and disarmament.

First, the United Nations must be strengthened and reformed to effectively prevent and settle armed conflicts. This is the purpose for which the Organization was established. This is where success or failure will ultimately be determined. Long-term prevention should address the root causes of conflict: poverty, social injustice, oppression and violations of human rights. The United Nations world conferences have established the close relationship between security and development. The United Nations must continue to build on this political platform.

Conflict prevention is a task which requires coordinated action by the United Nations system as a whole, including the international financial organizations, and also by non-governmental organizations. Cooperation at the regional and subregional levels is increasingly important for building a security environment based on common values and norms.

It is equally urgent to strengthen the ability of the United Nations to act on the threat of an erupting conflict. The whole range of United Nations instruments, including those mentioned in Article 33 of the Charter, should be developed and used to their full potential. Sweden wishes to cooperate with other Member States to enhance the United Nations capacity for early warning and early action. The new generation of peacekeeping operations must combine political, military, humanitarian and civilian United Nations action, and strike the right balance between various forms of response. The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator plays a key role in fostering a response to humanitarian crises. This should lay the groundwork for post-conflict reconstruction and long-term recovery of war-torn nations.

The Swedish Government supports efforts to set up a rapidly deployable mission headquarters within the United Nations. Together with Austria, Canada, Denmark and Norway, we are creating the multinational Stand-by Forces High-Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) to enhance the United Nations capacity for rapid deployment. In many situations United Nations civilian police can help prevent conflict and restore ravaged societies. I therefore

appreciated the opportunity I had, during Sweden's presidency of the Security Council in July, to deliver a presidential statement on civilian police in peacekeeping operations. It calls on Member States to make qualified police quickly available to the United Nations through better and standardized training.

We need a global security architecture: a web of organizations capable of dealing quickly with a wide range of threats and potential conflicts. Regional organizations will further gain in importance. But the primary and overall responsibility remains with the United Nations. Conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peace-building and humanitarian action to protect the victims of conflicts have to be at the core of United Nations reform efforts. But the decisive factor will not be the instruments with which we equip the Organization, but rather our willingness to use them, to pay for them and to accept the authority of the United Nations.

My second theme is that the United Nations must be strengthened and reformed to combat poverty and promote sustainable development. Fighting poverty, supporting sustainable development and promoting economic integration are part of the Organization's mandate as set out in the Charter. Sweden sees this crucial task as being in its own best interest. Our own development has benefited much from the multilateralism of this century.

The Swedish Government wholeheartedly supports the proposals of the Secretary-General to reform the United Nations in the economic and social fields. We want an empowered and capable United Nations. We want a unified United Nations presence in the field so that the United Nations system can be a reliable and flexible partner for developing countries. We want long-term commitments from donors and more equitable burden-sharing for financing development.

Sweden is one of the four countries fulfilling the United Nations aid target. Over a three-year period, by the year 2000, we undertake to further increase our aid budget, challenging the international trend. In spite of a few difficult years, we have kept up our voluntary contributions to the multilateral system. In the coming years we foresee increases. To support debt relief for the poorest countries the Swedish Government will contribute 295 million Swedish Krona to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative.

One of the greatest challenges facing the international community in the coming years will be to achieve global sustainable development. The industrialized countries must take the lead and learn how to do more with less input of resources and energy. Our goal should be to use energy and raw materials 10 times more efficiently. In our efforts to combat climate change, the developed countries should, this December in Kyoto, agree to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.

My third theme is that the United Nations must be strengthened and reformed to protect and promote human rights. Sweden applauds the Secretary-General's steps to integrate human rights into all United Nations activities. We welcome the appointment of the distinguished Mrs Mary Robinson as High Commissioner for Human Rights. Next year the United Nations will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This historic document establishes the individual as a subject in international relations, with her or his own rights and aspirations. Violations of human rights are a legitimate concern for the international community.

The Human Rights Year 1998 will be an opportunity for celebration, but also for critical assessment. We should reform human rights machinery and strengthen assistance in this field. The implementation of international human rights standards must be improved. Public information and fact-finding on human rights violations are crucial. It is particularly important to expose any attempt by Governments to silence those who bravely stand up in defence of human rights and basic humanitarian principles in their own countries.

Sweden will continue to work hard to combat torture. We will stand firm in our rejection of the death penalty, wherever practised. It is an abhorrent practice, unworthy of our times.

Cooperation must be enhanced to eradicate sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking in children and women. Governments need to take firm action against discrimination based on gender, ethnic origin or religious belief.

Next year's diplomatic conference will be a milestone in the decades-long endeavour to establish an international criminal court. The court will play a crucial role in closing the gap of impunity for those who commit genocide, serious war crimes and systematic or large-scale human rights violations.

My fourth and last theme is that the United Nations must be strengthened and reformed to build security

through disarmament. Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control are central features of any policy aimed at preventing conflict, promoting peace and fostering economic and social development. They must become fully integrated elements in a coordinated policy for peace-building.

The 1990s have seen impressive progress towards disarmament, but much work lies ahead. The international political and security climate now offers a historic opportunity. It must be fully translated into concrete actions.

It is imperative that the quest for a nuclear-weapon-free world continue. Sweden urges the Russian Federation to ratify the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks II (START II), enabling the conclusion of START III. This should pave the way for further reductions, on the part of all nuclear-weapon States, with a view to the total elimination of nuclear arsenals, in accordance with Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons has proposed a series of measures to achieve a world free from nuclear weapons. Its report merits in-depth consideration in international disarmament forums. Let me focus on two timely aspects.

The Commission proposes that nuclear forces should be taken off alert and that warheads be removed from their delivery vehicles. I urge the United States and Russia to apply these measures without delay to all strategic weapons covered by START II, and subsequently by START III.

Nuclear-weapon-free States have a legitimate right to assurances that they will not be attacked or threatened by nuclear weapons. The time has come to elaborate a legally binding instrument under the NPT, giving such assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States Parties.

Conventional arms — especially light weaponry — are at the heart of today's conflicts. They aggravate tensions, provoke and prolong wars and inflict human suffering — sometimes long after ceasefires and peace settlements. The flow of conventional arms to areas of tension and conflict must be stemmed. I welcome the high priority given to such objectives in the Secretary-General's reform programme. There is a need for export control of conventional arms as well as of dual-use products. International cooperation in this field and the demand for an international code of conduct for arms transfers are matters of high priority for the Swedish Government.

From a humanitarian point of view, anti-personnel landmines are in a category of their own: indiscriminate by nature, crippling innocent children, women, men and nations. I am proud to say that Sweden was the first State to propose a total ban on this terrible type of weapon. I warmly welcome the Oslo agreement on a convention on such a ban. I urge all States to accede to it. We must now make every effort to achieve universal adherence to this ban.

Reform is necessary to build a stronger and more relevant United Nations. I have outlined some major aspects from Sweden's point of view. As I have emphasized, but must not look at United Nations reform in isolation, we must consider why we need the Organization and what it can do for all of us through all of us.

Today's international environment is rife with contradictions. We have a globalized economy, but we also have a periphery unable to benefit, and left further and further behind. We have ever closer international cooperation, but we also have aggressive nationalism and xenophobia. We have growing support for democracy and human rights, but we also have atrocities and blatant disregard for international law.

In this situation, the purpose of the United Nations should be precisely what is spelled out in its name and its Charter: to unite nations and people.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic, His Excellency Mr. Eduardo Latorre. I give him the floor.

Mr. Latorre (Dominican Republic) (*interpretation from Spanish*): On behalf of the Dominican Republic and its President Mr. Leonel Fernandez Reyna, I wish to convey to our President our warmest congratulations on his well deserved election to preside over this fifty-second session of the General Assembly, at a time when the Organization is taking important steps forward in its re-structuring and modernization in order to meet the challenges of peace and economic and social development for our nations.

Our delegation pays tribute to the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Razali Ismail, for his outstanding conduct of the deliberations during the last session of the General Assembly.

We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his assiduity, dedication and hard work in guiding the Organization down a road of reform and modernization that will make it stronger for the new millennium.

While remaining faithful to the purposes and principles set forth in the Charter — the maintenance of international peace and security, cooperation for economic, social and cultural development, defence of human rights, and humanitarian assistance — the United Nations should also promote and pursue a reform process which takes into account the many changes that have taken place in a complex international scene. That scene is marked by the end of ideological confrontations and, at the same time, by increasing levels of poverty and ethnic and religious tension, phenomena that pose a threat to our supreme objectives of peace and development for our peoples.

The trend within the Organization in recent years to the establishment of working groups, as well as the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform", reflect the strong resolve of Member States to engage in a negotiation and consultation process that could, once their distrust of the past is overcome, culminate in far-reaching changes in the various United Nations bodies. The Dominican Republic attaches special importance to the ongoing reform process, given that it is capable, while respecting the principles and purposes that gave birth to the Organization, of ensuring a more democratic, transparent, representative and efficient system capable of facing the current challenges, especially those of peace and the problems of poverty that affect the peoples of the world.

In this regard, the strengthening of the General Assembly, the main forum in which Member States are represented, cannot be postponed. It is imperative to promote a process of better coordination between the Assembly and the Security Council, so that the Assembly can be properly informed, and hence make better recommendations to the Security Council.

Aware of the need to strengthen the United Nations, the Dominican Republic calls on this forum to adopt resolutions that can return to the Assembly its capacity as the governing body of the Organization. In this regard, we welcome the proposals of the Secretary-General designed to focus the work of the Assembly on the highest-priority issues and to reduce the duration of its sessions as well as the number of agenda items, so as to allow for their in-depth study.

This reorientation should not interfere with the principle of sovereign equality, nor with the plural and universal character that the Organization has maintained over the more than half a century of its existence. Reaffirmation of the democratic principles contained in the Charter must constitute the basis for the current reform process.

The Dominican Republic proposes the establishment of mechanisms and working methods that would enable the Assembly to allow reasonable time for making progress on resolving certain conflicts. The problems of peace, security and development are multiple and complex. However, the commitment of the international community expressed in the United Nations should go beyond merely recalling them each year.

The aspect of the reform of the Organization that has raised the greatest debate is the one relating to the restructuring and enlargement of the Security Council. Our country hopes that these reforms will promote greater participation by the membership as a whole. Thus, with a more democratic base and a just and equitable selection process, the Council would be in a better position to meet its purposes and objectives. In this regard, the Dominican Republic proposes the expansion of the Security Council from the current 15 to 25 members. This represents less than 14 per cent of the total number of United Nations Member States, whereas in 1945 the figure was slightly above 20 per cent.

The Dominican Republic, a founding member of the United Nations, has not yet been a member of the Security Council. In this new phase of its international relations it has a strong interest in participating actively in bodies such as the Security Council and thus making a direct contribution to the maintenance of peace, on which depends the very existence of nations.

An encouraging sign in the proposal of the Secretary-General is that the reforms are constantly related to the achievement of the founding principles of the Organization, as expressed in the Charter. Thus, the results of reform will be assessed primarily not on the basis of the relationship of costs to benefits, but rather on how they facilitate the realization of the Organization's objectives.

Our country supports the restructuring of the Organization as long as it promotes more transparent, clearer and more coherent mandates and is directed towards finding lasting solutions to the problems of

hunger, underdevelopment, extreme poverty and social injustice, not forgetting the mandates related to peacekeeping.

Allow me to refer to the issue of development. The increase in global poverty and the gap between rich and poor countries is today the crucial problem for the international community. Poverty has a negative impact on progress with regard to peace and security, human rights and the strengthening of democratic systems. We must address forthwith the challenge posed by the tremendous economic and social instability of a large number of countries.

The Dominican delegation associates itself with the declarations of the Group of 77 adopted in July of this year, at the twenty-second meeting of the group coordinators, because we support strengthening the role of the United Nations in promoting international cooperation for social and economic development. And we are in favour of measures that will promote the formulation and coordination of policies and the provision of technical assistance to developing countries.

Our country is making serious efforts to position itself favourably in the world economy and to prepare for globalization. For this purpose, it is currently conducting major economic, monetary, tariff and judicial reforms, while at the same time negotiating free-trade agreements with countries of the region. Also, together with other countries, it is formulating strategies to take advantage of funds from multilateral sources.

The achievements of regional groups such as the Central American Common Market, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Andean Group and the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), among others, are indications of the strong willingness of the Member States to expand their capacities and reduce the negative impact that the new rules of international trade have on our economies and societies.

Aware of the commitment to promote at the regional level mechanisms for improving economic growth and combating poverty, the Dominican Republic has in the past year strengthened its relations with the countries of CARICOM and Central America, primarily through the participation of our President in the meetings of heads of State and Government. We are pleased to announce that our country will host the next summit meeting of Central America, Belize and the Dominican Republic and that negotiations for the establishment of a free-trade area between CARICOM and the Dominican Republic should be concluded by the end of this year.

At this time allow me to welcome very enthusiastically the initiatives of the group of Central American countries designed to strengthen Central American unity. It is precisely these efforts that have given us faith and confidence in the future of our peoples.

During this year, the Dominican Republic has developed a programme for strengthening our links with our neighbouring country, Haiti. For the first time, bi-national joint commissions are crossing the border to find, through dialogue, areas of mutual interest and solutions to some of the problems common to both countries.

Regarding our sister Republic of Haiti, we insist on the need for the international community to discharge effectively the economic commitment it made in 1994 with regard to Haiti's economic recovery and development. The peacekeeping efforts in Haiti, which we have promoted in the United Nations, will not be sufficient to achieve democratic stability unless they are accompanied by resources directed to alleviating the great economic and social problems affecting that nation.

We must again emphasize how external debt is weighing down our economies. The onerous costs of debt-servicing hinder our investing more in our peoples, thus deepening the levels of poverty. For the Dominican Republic, the payment of outstanding debts and the interest on them represents nearly 20 per cent of the national budget. As a means of promoting development and social investment projects to combat poverty, we wish to propose to this Assembly that it take the necessary actions to reduce the burden of the external debt in those developing countries that have demonstrated a high level of responsibility in handling their debt.

We reiterate the commitment of the United Nations to develop efficient measures for the struggle against poverty. Along with peacekeeping, development cooperation must constitute an overarching goal of the Organization. No financing of activities for peacekeeping, the defence of human rights or humanitarian actions will be sufficient if we do not act responsibly in undertaking multilateral cooperation for development.

The proposal to unify the various programmes of the United Nations devoted to development seems to us to be a very important step towards the effective coordination of intersectoral policies, concentrating strategies and

development operations in a United Nations Development Group. These initiatives must reorient resources toward areas of priority and achieve better coordination with international funding organizations.

Allow me to express the position of my country regarding the evolution of the international situation. Peace is still among the highest aspiration of our peoples. Different points of the planet are currently involved in bloody conflicts which affect common citizens. Security is today not only a matter of the survival of political regimes, but is linked to the very existence of human beings and nature.

The Dominican Republic expresses its solidarity with the many conventions of the international community devoted to eradicating corruption, terrorism, drug trafficking and money laundering. These evils disrupt the lives of our peoples, erode our institutions and prevent the strengthening of democracy.

We reiterate our conviction regarding the defence of democratic principles and institutionality. In this regard, my country is making tremendous efforts to reform and modernize the State and the judicial system. Establishing means of promoting a transparent public administration, controlling all forms of administrative corruption, is among the ongoing processes in our nation. Dialogue and the search for consensus among the branches of the State and between the executive branch and civil society have become the polestar of public administration of the Dominican Government.

The Dominican Republic welcomes and associates itself with the measures taken by the United Nations to extend the presence of the peacekeeping forces in Haiti. Their presence, we believe, strengthens the possibilities for democratic stability and will allow the people to take sure steps on the road towards consolidating the country's democracy.

We stress the need for a definitive and peaceful solution to the conflict in the Balkans, and we call upon the international community to strengthen its efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East. The crisis in that region, which has deteriorated in recent months, demands special attention. We call for respect for all the agreements signed in recent years in order to restore peace in the region.

With regard to the Republic of China on Taiwan, the Dominican Republic reiterates its position as presented by our President, Dr. Leonel Fernandez Reyna, regarding the need for the international community to consider the importance of that country, owing to its geographical location and given the fact that security and stability are of great significance for the peace and prosperity of the region. We call for a constructive dialogue between the two sides of the Strait of Taiwan in search of mutual understanding and cooperation. We reiterate that parallel participation of both countries in the United Nations would contribute to the maintenance of peace.

Our country supports the efforts under way in various international conferences in Brussels, Oslo, and very soon in Ottawa, regarding the process to achieve a total ban an anti-personnel landmines. The commitment to peace is a commitment to life. The international community has an obligation to promote peace and to defend life in all situations and circumstances.

The Dominican Republic, traditionally a peace-oriented nation, does not produce or consume nuclear energy for military purposes; it utilizes such energy for peaceful purposes. In this spirit, the Dominican President signed the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty during his visit to the United Nations last year.

Various international conferences are currently discussing conventions on the use of nuclear energy. One of them is the convention to regulate the harm caused to persons and the environment by radioactive waste. The Dominican Republic depends to a large extent on tourism, a tourism of beaches and sun. The quality of our coastal waters is vital for the sector's development, and any international radioactivity-related damage can mean the collapse of this important sector of our economy. We appeal to the good judgement of the international community to preserve our natural resources.

We reaffirm our commitment to the protection of the environment and natural resources. In this spirit, our country has acceded to the United Nations International Convention to Combat Desertification.

The Dominican Republic reiterates its commitment to defending and protecting human rights. In this connection, it welcomes the efforts made by the United Nations to concentrate the activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Centre for Human Rights. During this year we have had the satisfaction of receiving two international missions on human rights, invited by our Government. A High-Level Mission of the Inter-American Committee on Human Rights (ICHR), of the Organization of American States,

visited the country in June, and a mission of the Committee of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations, with headquarters in Geneva, is in the country at this very moment. These visits indicate the Government's interest in ensuring transparency of action to defend and protect human rights in the Dominican Republic.

Allow me to refer to the situation of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women. Our country wishes to reiterate the mandate given in Economic and Social Council resolution 1979/11 of 9 May 1979, in which it is clearly and explicitly stated that the headquarters of the Institute would be established in the Dominican Republic, a developing country.

The objectives that led to the creation of the Institute are still valid today. Research and training for the purpose of creating new ways for women to contribute to the development of their countries, in the light of women's needs, are a priority. This concern was manifested at the Beijing Conference of 1995 and in the Platform for Action to follow up the agreements reached in that important forum.

In order to cooperate with the United Nations, the Dominican Government not only donated the building housing the Institute but also invested large amounts of money to renovate the building and adapt it to the Institute's needs. This explains our surprise when, in 1993, the United Nations Secretariat proposed the merger of the Institute and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), without prior consultation with our Government and ignoring the headquarters agreement. However, in 1995 the Fourth World Conference on Women, in its Beijing Platform for Action, confirmed the Institute's mandate.

We hope that in the process of United Nations reform all the mandates approved by the Member States will be equally respected, since these States bear sole responsibility for renewing or changing decisions adopted by the General Assembly.

Lastly, we welcome the summoning of Member States to reflect on and endorse these transformations in our world Organization. The Assembly of the millennium proposed to us for the year 2000 would be an unprecedented forum for evaluating what we have done on the road to these reforms and for reiterating our tremendous faith and trust in the future of the generations of the twenty-first century.

At this fifty-second session of the General Assembly we are faced with the historic responsibility of giving greater reality to our hopes and expectations for a better future for humankind. The changes in those realities are taking place faster than the changes in the structures we have given ourselves for dealing with them. We have a unique opportunity to ensure that the reforms of the Organization respond to the expectations of a United Nations that is in line with the needs of the new age.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Angola, His Excellency Mr. Venancio de Moura.

Mr. de Moura (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text furnished by the delegation*): On behalf of the Republic of Angola, allow me first to congratulate the President, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, on his election to preside over the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

Allow me also to congratulate the outgoing President, Ambassador Razali Ismail, on the excellent work he performed.

We should also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his dedication and determination in turning the United Nations into a more effective instrument to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The cold war, which was the main obstacle that for decades prevented the United Nations from performing its role fully, a role defined by its founding Members in the Charter, is now a thing of the past. But our world Organization has not yet achieved the degree of efficiency that the Member countries and their people would desire, with the result that sometimes despair and a lack of confidence are felt, instead of trust in its efforts.

The construction of the new democratic world order to which we all aspire will demand that the principal forum for multilateral diplomacy, the United Nations, play a greater role. In this context, the complete restructuring and revitalization of its system and an end to the present financial crisis, which is affecting its normal functioning, are essential.

The issue of the restructuring of the Security Council should therefore be given priority. The current structure of that body is obsolete, reflecting a reality that prevailed more than 50 years ago. How is it conceivable that

regions such as the African continent, which makes up the largest regional group at the United Nations, or Latin America, are not represented among the permanent Members of the Security Council? Therefore, it is high time that the geographical composition of that body be overhauled to allow for more balanced and more equitable representation. In this regard, Angola endorses the African claim for no fewer than two seats among the permanent members of the Security Council. The Council's working methods should also be revised in order to ensure greater transparency in its decision-making processes.

Angola supports the declaration made by the Heads of State of the Organization of African Unity, as well as the statement made by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the non-aligned countries on reform of the Security Council.

The recent proposals made by the Secretary-General on reform will certainly boost the process of overhauling the United Nations. Angola welcomes the contents of those proposals, although we would have preferred to see further improvements in some aspects. We are, however, optimistic as to the outcome.

As the Assembly is aware, the Lusaka Protocol which was signed in 1994 between the Government and the armed opposition, UNITA, was intended to solve the post-electoral crisis provoked by UNITA and at the same time to put the country back on the path towards peace, national reconciliation and democracy. However, approximately three years since the beginning of its implementation, Angola is still far from achieving those goals due to the systematic failures by UNITA to meet its obligations and to its repeated delaying tactics. This is a clear demonstration of bad faith and lack of political will by its leadership. It appears that the leader of this organization has not abandoned its strategy of taking power by force. He is still resisting the transformation of UNITA into a true political party and UNITA's complete demilitarization, even though the single national army, which includes in its ranks thousands of men provided by UNITA, has already been formed.

UNITA still maintains a private, heavily armed army made up of around 35,000 men, 4,000 of whom belong to the UNITA leader's personal guard. This constitutes a serious violation of the Lusaka Protocol and is the main cause of the current climate of tension and insecurity in some parts of Angola. The members of this army include troops that UNITA hid from the United Nations during the quartering process, recently demobilized UNITA troops who have been recruited again by force, and former soldiers of the former Republic of Zaire.

At the same time, UNITA is still continuing its military build-up through the reactivation of military bases and acquisition of sophisticated weapons from foreign countries, in clear contradiction of paragraph 19 of Security Council resolution 864 (1993).

On the other hand, UNITA is holding on to large portions of national territory which were supposed to be handed over to government administration. This is impeding exercise of the State's sovereignty throughout the country and the free movement of people and goods. The control of some of these areas is aimed at exploring for, and then smuggling and exploiting, their natural resources to finance UNITA's war machinery and satisfy the individual interests of its leadership.

As a result of these actions, the perspectives created with the inauguration of the Government of National Unity and Reconciliation and the swearing-in of the Parliament have been postponed.

UNITA's behaviour in the peace process is repugnant as well as ambiguous. It insists on armed opposition despite the fact that it is part of the main power institutions and despite the fact that Angola has a democratic, pluralist system in which all political parties can freely carry out their activities.

The international community has already expressed, repeatedly and categorically, its condemnation of and dismay at UNITA's actions. In 1993 the Security Council applied the first package of restrictive measures against UNITA. More recently, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1127 (1997), which applies a new package of measures against UNITA as a result of its lack of cooperation in the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol. The position taken by the Council above all displays the concern of the international community and its determination to prevent the UNITA leadership strategy from being implemented. Otherwise, peace and stability in Angola and the entire region of central and southern Africa would be at risk.

The Government of Angola reiterates its firm support for resolution 1127 (1997), because we feel that it is a strong means of pressure aimed at dissuading UNITA from its intention to return to war, encouraging it to speed up its demilitarization and transformation into

a political party, and put an end to its jurisdiction over parts of Angolan territory.

Taking the above into account, the Angolan people look forward to the Security Council's demonstrating firmness and determination in implementing resolution 1127 (1997), immediately putting into force sanctions against UNITA unless that organization changes its behaviour and gives proof of good faith in complying with its outstanding obligations.

The Government of Angola is optimistic about the successful conclusion of the peace process and will continue to do its utmost to guarantee the full implementation of the Lusaka Protocol.

Before turning to another subject, I would like to express the sincerest gratitude of the Government of Angola to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Angola, Mr. Alioune Blondin Beye, and to the Governments of the troika of observers, Portugal, Russia and the United States, for their untiring efforts to bring about peace in Angola.

Recent changes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have contributed to alleviating the tensions in the central African region, opening new perspectives for its States and peoples in terms of stability and development.

The present climate will allow stability to prevail in the region and will allow for better coordination among States with a view to reinforcing the observance of the principle of good neighbourliness.

The Angolan Government is very apprehensive regarding the crisis in the Republic of the Congo, a country with which Angola shares a common border, close consanguinity and historic ties.

The Republic of Angola favours a negotiated solution to the crisis and supports the international mediation efforts headed by Mr. Omar Bongo, President of the Republic of Gabon. Our Government also supports the deployment of an international force as soon as a political settlement emerges from the negotiations.

In Sierra Leone, we deplore the interruption of the democratic process and the overthrow of the legitimately elected institutions. The Government of Angola supports the efforts of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and, in particular, of neighbouring countries to restore the democratic institutions.

We are also concerned with the situation in the Republic of the Comoros, where tensions are threatening the country's independence and territorial integrity. We encourage the international community to support the efforts of the OAU in the search for a peaceful solution able to preserve the territorial integrity and independence of that country.

The situation in Somalia continues to deteriorate, and a solution acceptable to all the parties concerned has yet to be found. The Angolan Government approves of the efforts made by member countries of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and, in particular, the most recent initiatives of Ethiopia in bringing the representatives of the Somali factions together at the negotiating table.

Of particular concern to us is the ostracism displayed in the main international forums with regard to the Somali crisis.

In Western Sahara the recent opening of direct negotiations between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO front is a positive sign. The Angolan Government has always been in favour of a negotiated solution to the conflict which takes into account the aspirations of the populations of the territory and encourages the parties to honour the agreements signed in Houston and to continue the ongoing dialogue in good faith. In this connection, we support the joint efforts of the OAU and the United Nations.

We are concerned with the continuation of the Israeli-Arab conflict, the primary cause of the deteriorating situation in the Middle East. Recent events have delayed the peace process and have led to further deterioration of the situation in the region. Angola reaffirms its support for the peace process in the Middle East. Its success depends upon the reinforcement of mutual trust and the full implementation of the accords signed between the parties concerned.

We endorse the position expressed in the Declaration of the Heads of State or Government of the OAU and the statement made in New Delhi at the ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement with regard to the question of Palestine.

My Government expresses its concern at the lack of progress in the initiatives to bring about a just solution to the question of East Timor. The Government of Angola

deplores the refusal by one of the parties to accept President Mandela's initiative.

The economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on Cuba is a matter of concern to my Government, particularly because of its negative impact on the economic and social situation of the Cuban people. We reiterate our appeal to have the embargo lifted, which will contribute to relations between two peoples.

(*spoke in English*)

Finally, I should like to thank those who have given me the opportunity to speak today. As the Assembly knows, my speech was to be delivered on 26 September. However, due to a sad event which has happened in my country, I have to leave tonight, and I was obliged to ask the Assembly to give me the opportunity to deliver my speech today.

One of our colleagues, the former of Minister for Foreign Affairs of Angola, passed away yesterday. It is my duty to return home to pay my respects to my dear colleague. Many here know Foreign Minister "Loy".

I wish the Assembly well, and may good work be done here for peace, stability and international cooperation.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I would like to express sincere condolences to the Government of Angola on the death of their brother, who spoke here at the General Assembly in years past.

We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply. I would like to remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Sir John Weston (United Kingdom): I would like to speak briefly in response to the remarks made today by the Foreign Minister of Argentina concerning the Falkland Islands.

We welcome the Foreign Minister's references to the high level of cooperation between the United Kingdom and Argentina which characterizes our bilateral relationship. The British Government sincerely hopes that the progress which has been achieved will be built on and developed.

But the British Government does not accept the Foreign Minister's remarks about sovereignty. We have no doubt about Britain's sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and over the other British dependencies in the South Atlantic.

In the Falkland Islands we must heed the wishes of the people. The elected representatives of the islanders, who visited the United Nations for the debate in the Committee of 24 in June this year, expressed their views clearly. They requested recognition that they, like any other democratic people, should be allowed to exercise the right of self-determination. As the democratic voice of the Falkland Islands people, they reiterated their view that they did not want to be part of Argentina.

Despite our differences with Argentina on the subject of sovereignty, we maintain a constructive dialogue with the Argentine Government on matters such as hydrocarbons development and fisheries in the South Atlantic. We continue to hold discussions on these issues on a regular basis while maintaining our position regarding sovereignty over the Falklands, and we value these practical steps to develop United Kingdom-Argentine cooperation. I hope both sides can leave it at that for today.

Ms. Ramírez (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Republic of Argentina, having heard the statement of the representative of the United Kingdom, would like to reiterate the ideas expressed in the general debate this afternoon by the Foreign Minister of Argentina, Mr. Guido Di Tella.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.